

[Rev. Lorenzo Dow]

Lorenzo Dow (White)

From History of Methodism in Alabama

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Lowndes County, Alabama.

Print

REV. LORENZO DOW

Rev. Lorenzo Dow was the first Protestant preacher to preach in any part of the territory that is now Alabama. He claimed to be a Methodist and affiliated with that denomination, but they would not be responsible for him in anything he did. In May, 1803, Rev. Mr. Dow preached to the settlers in the Tombigbee and Tensaw settlements.

This was the first preaching ever done in Alabama except by Romish priests. However, when these settlements along the Tombigbee were developed, and became safe from the Indians and their claims were ceded to the U.S., heralds of the cross found its people and the voice of the messengers of peace was heard in the wilderness.

Rev. Dow described in some of his writings the inhabitants as mostly English, but were like "Sheep without a shepherd," and while it was under Spanish government it was a refuge for bad men.

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Lorenzo Dow was born Oct. 16, 1777, in Coventry, Tolland County, Connecticut. He was descended from the English ancestors. He was the subject of early religious impressions. Before he was four years old he expressed himself as "Mused upon God, Heaven and Hell."

He was united with a society of Methodists being received into it by Rev. G. Roberts. He claimed Hope Hull as his spiritual advisor. Rev. Mr. Dow made a long and hard struggle against the conviction that 'it was his duty to preach, but at last yielded to the conviction that God had called him to the ministry.

He met with strong opposition from his father as to this move and still stronger from the members of the church and when he sought to obtain a license to preach he was discouraged and at first was rejected and sent 2 away. He continued to press his claim and finally admitted on trial September 19, 1898. Ill health prompted him to come South. He was lured by the warm mild climate, and with his wife Peggy, made the long tiresome hazardous trip. The journey was both dangerous and difficult, but to Dow perils were a fascination. In his journals which have been sacredly kept, he tells of these many perils and adventures among the wild tribes he encountered.

Any feature of the uncivilized and the wilderness appealed to him. On the stages of the long journey Southward he preferred camping out at night, especially in the piney woods country. Huge piles of a straw was raked up which served as the bed and he would be lulled to sleep by the soothing monotone of the sighing pines. There was also a hope entertained that the resinous regions possessed a curative power for his malady. A singular chapter in his life was a great desire and fancy to preach to the Roman Catholics and hearing Ireland was their greatest stronghold he would thither, but his pathway was not strewn with roses by any means. He requested a leave of absence from the Conference in order to make the trip abroad, but the request was not granted and he took

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the leave of absence anyway against their advice and entreaties. He consumed about twenty months on this trip, preaching the gospel incessantly and attending camp meetings.

Notwithstanding he had made the European tour against the authority of the Conference, he resumed preaching on his return and remained on "trial." However, he could not stand the test and his name was soon dropped from the minutes.

He was not careful to maintain the relationship with the Conference which he had so eagerly sought. He was sent out on circuit assignments but this did not correspond with the expansive fields of his dreams. He was discontented. In a word he did not consider a circuit his right sphere, and claimed that his connection with the conference was severed. He was never really ordained to the ministry and was without authority to administer sacrament or organize societies. In doctrinal principles he was Methodist, but was without any church influence or allegiance. He was irregular and uncertain. He was a force, but uncertain, unreliable and inefficient.

He was restless and he was a dreamer. He was contradictory and never happier than when engaged in a wordy war. He possessed scant learning, but was a very close observer of mankind. The very face of Lorenzo Dow indicated his character. His features were both rough and delicate. It was rough and effeminate but in that face there was every mark of indomitable energy.

He parted his hair in the middle and wore it hanging down his neck and shoulders and his face was radiant with kindness. His wife, Peggy, whom he married before coming South, in her writings, "Vicissitudes" gives an account of their first trip coming South and also gives an account of a trip which she made with him passing through the Bigbee settlements in Nov., 1811, from Natchez, Mississippi to Milledgdville, Ga., in the wilderness some forty miles. She says "At night we camped out in lonely deserts, uninhabited by any being except wild beasts and savages."

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"I was much alarmed and uneasy, but my husband was content and slept sweetly." In giving an account of her first meeting with him she says, "He is a most singular character, and admits himself that he was known by the name of 'Crazy Dow' and called hiself 'son of Thunder'.

Despite his ill health he boated that he held off death. He refused to die and said he must live to fight for the Kingdom. He did not believe in founding churches but preferred to preach and praise God in the wilds and in the open. However, a prominent jurist of Alabama, who is closely connected with Lowndes County, claims to have the historical facts that Dow preached from the altar one time if no more. The small church known as "Union" which is nestled in a grove between the small settlements of Burkeville and Manack, Lowndes County, claims the distinction of having him preach there in its early history.

The tradition, in part, is that Sam Manac, the half-breed, who founded the latter place and from whom it was named, met Dow during his wanderings through the wilds and led him to that altar. Union Church, now obscure, holds an interesting part in the early history of Lowndes. Dow, the first man who passed the holy words around and around in Alabama, preached there. The Graves family, ancestors of Alabama's ex-governor, worshipped at that altar. Some of which sleep in the nearby churchyard, and it is built in the road that was the route of the thorough county stage coach line, 'most a hundred years ago.

Rev. Dow died February 2, 1834, in Georgetown, D.C., was buried near Washington, but remains were removed and re-buried in Oakhill Cemetery, near Georgetown.

He had one son, Neal, who was Brigadier in Union Army and author of "Main Law."

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